

**THE UFO FILES:**  
**Britain's Roswell**

The History Channel, Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup>  
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The second episode of The History Channel's new series, *The UFO Files*, featured what some believe may be the single most important UFO case in history, most certainly the biggest case in the UK. That event has become known as the Rendlesham Incident, or Britain's Roswell.

In December of 1980, peculiar lights were reported over the twin RAF bases of Woodbridge & Bentwaters in Suffolk. Many US Air Force personnel reported these objects, physical evidence was found, on-site recordings were made and official documents were filed and classified. Rumours abounded for three years until the famous Halt Memorandum was released through the US Freedom of Information Act, thus crystallizing the Rendlesham Incident in the minds of UFO researchers around the globe.

This program featured many, but not all, of the main players in the story, focussing on the men that were, or claimed to be, there. We also heard

from researchers that helped push this startling event into the public domain, although the people that broke the story, to such an extent that it briefly made the front pages of national newspapers, were strangely absent.

We began with an overview of the Bentwaters base. In 1980, it was one of the largest, most important in Europe, with over 12,000 personnel serving and protecting a significant nuclear arsenal. It was the height of the Cold War, with tensions between NATO and the Soviet Union at boiling point. Vigilance was not only necessary, it was imperative.



John Burroughs told of how he and his sergeant saw odd lights in the dense forest that separated the two bases. Alarmed by what they had seen, they headed back to the security point and phoned in their sighting on a secure line. Tech. Sergeant Jim Penniston was dispatched to their position and the group headed out into the forest.

Penniston saw the lights and at first thought he was looking at a downed aircraft. He called in his fears and questioned the two men present. Burroughs and Penniston, along with

the sergeant's driver, drove deeper into the trees to investigate. Burrough's sergeant was to afraid to assist and he was left behind.



Burroughs and Penniston left their jeep and walked towards the lights. Their radios suffered from strong interference and the closer they got to their goal, the more certain they became that this was no plane crash.

In a clearing, they were illuminated by a blinding light. Penniston approached the light and it dimmed to reveal a large, dark, pyramidal object, roughly nine feet wide by eight feet high. He took several photographs and constantly made notes, but his handwriting became more illegible the closer he got to the object. He saw peculiar symbols on the object and he drew these into his notepad. Other than these markings, he could make out no other features. He reached out and touched the craft, finding it warm to the touch and as smooth as glass. Light emanated from the fabric of the hull.

There was another blinding flash and the men dove for cover. The craft lifted up out of the trees and sped away into the night sky. Penniston

said that he had never seen an aircraft move as fast in his Air Force career.



Then they saw another light flashing in the trees, but they almost immediately realised that this was the beam from the Orford Ness lighthouse, some five miles distant. Their radios began working normally and they called in a report.

On returning to the base, they were debriefed, but fearing for their careers, the men gave a 'sanitised' report, omitting the more weird aspects to their experience. Their superior officer warned them that 'some things were best left alone'.



Unable to put the event out of his mind, Penniston returned to the site in Rendlesham Forest the next day and found depressions in the ground where the UFO had been seen. They

were in a triangular formation, exactly 9.8 feet apart. He made plaster of Paris moulds of the indentations. He decided not to hand over his moulds to his superiors.

Two nights later, Deputy Base Commander, Lt. Col. Charles Halt, was enjoying a relaxing evening at an officer's Christmas party when one of his men arrived in an agitated state and reported to Halt that "It's back!"

Halt was determined to put this nonsense to rest. His men were supposed to be protecting billions of dollars worth of military hardware, not chasing phantom lights through the trees. He organised a security detail and they headed out into the forest. On arriving, Halt found that a security cordon had been set in place and large, mobile units known as Light-Alls deployed, although they would not work properly for some reason.

Although the UFO was no longer visible, Halt and his men headed into the trees, armed with a still camera, a Geiger counter, a night vision scope and Halt's personal cassette recorder, upon which he captured one of the most amazing pieces of audio footage ever. Halt was certain that he could find a logical explanation for the UFO reports.

Then we were treated to the actual recording Halt made on his recorder (a copy of which can be found on the free CD with the first issue of the UFOData Report).



The Light-Alls refused to work, so they headed into the woods without the illumination afforded by the mobile units. They soon found that their radios became subject to the same interference that had plagued Burroughs and Penniston two nights previously. Halt saw that several trees had been damaged as though something large had moved through the forest, snapping off branches and scouring off bark as it went. He ordered for photographs to be taken. The Geiger counter began registering high levels of radiation on the sides of the trees that had been damaged, the sides that faced the alleged landing site.

Suddenly, the animals on the adjacent farm began making a great deal of noise and a glowing, red light appeared in the trees. Halt described it as looking like an eye winking at them. It moved through the trees towards their position. Halt said that it looked like it was dripping what looked like molten metal. Then it moved out into the farmer's field and hovered there for about twenty or thirty seconds before silently exploding into multiple white objects that sped away. On investigating the field, Halt's men could find no evidence of burn marks or debris

that might be left behind from what they had witnessed.

The object then reappeared, heading their way from the south and stopping overhead. It shone down what Halt described as a beam that was laser-like in its intensity. Halt's shock at what he is seeing is clearly evident on the tape. The beam then goes out and the object moves on over the base, specifically, some said, the nuclear weapons storage area, and begins shining its beam down to the ground again. It was here that Halt's recorder ran out of tape.



With the craft still hovering over the airfield, Halt decided that they should return to the base. They were met by John Burroughs and Adrian Bustinza. Burroughs was concerned about Halt's men, they seemed very shaken, he said. Then he saw a blue light in the field and pointed it out to the colonel. Halt gave him permission to check it out and he and Bustinza headed into the field, while Halt and his team went back to the base.

Burroughs and Bustinza ran towards the blue glow and just as they reached it, with Burroughs in the lead, it vanished. Bustinza told him

that he had seen him enter the blue light and disappear. He could not believe it. Burroughs had more questions than answers.

By January of 1981, the bases were full of rumours about what had gone on just after Christmas. Former head of the MOD UFO desk, Nick Pope, asserted that these men were highly-trained professionals, expert witnesses with many years of experience in most cases. The investigation that followed remains controversial twenty-five years later.

According to the airmen, they became involved, against their will, in a government cover-up. At first, routine was conformed to. Halt debriefed his men, as regulations required, and statements were taken. Penniston claimed that after the meetings with Halt, things 'began to get heavy'.

Two weeks after the debriefings, Penniston said he was interrogated by high-ranking officials from the Office of Special Investigations (OSI). Georgina Bruni, author of *You Can't Tell The People*, explained that the OSI had the power to question anybody. They could walk into a general's office and arrest him if they liked.

Penniston gave the OSI his statement and offered them the sketches he had made during his sighting. After this, Penniston cannot remember much about the interrogation, but he believes that he may have given consent for truth drugs such as sodium pentathol to be administered.



During the OSI's investigation, in which more and more people were called in, Adrian Bustinza was questioned so aggressively that he refuses to speak publicly about the incident to this day. Georgina Bruni says she has spoken with him, however, and he told her that the OSI forced him to agree, with a thinly-veiled threat of death, that what he saw was the light from Orford Ness. Other witnesses were also told to drop their stories about a UFO.

A short time later, Burroughs and Halt said that they saw activity going on in the forest, with personnel partaking in covert activities at the landing site. Halt's and Penniston's photographs came back from the processing lab completely fogged out. Penniston believes that the photos were intentionally whited-out. Even Halt, the highest ranking eyewitness, believes he was kept out of the loop of the investigation. He was asked to type up a memo describing the incident. He did so, believing it would be shared with the British authorities. The memo was not meant to be a definitive account of the incident and Halt made several mistakes and omissions, but he assumed that it would create

enough interest for a proper investigation to be started. The memo was filed away.

Three years later, the *News of the World* ran a headline story entitled: UFO LANDS IN SUFFOLK And That's OFFICIAL. The article was based around Halt's memo that had been released via the US Freedom of Information Act. The programme claimed that the memo was brought into the open by Larry Warren, a former security policeman at the base. Peter Robbins (who co-authored with Warren the book, *Left At East Gate*) explained how it was Warren's information that led to the memo being released to the public.



Warren's story is somewhat different to the one described in the Halt Memo:

On December, 29<sup>th</sup> 1980, a nineteen-year old Warren was ordered from his security post and told to go into the woods to assist with Colonel Halt's investigation. On reaching a clearing, he saw a group of military personnel standing around a glowing object.



He described Air Force officers conversing with three, small, child-like figures. Warren said that it seemed like some sort of protocol was being enacted, but before he could witness further, he was dismissed from the scene. The next day, he was taken for debriefing with several other witnesses and shown film footage of military/UFO interactions going back to perhaps the 1940s. Afterwards, Warren's memories become disjointed. He recalls being in an underground facility with medical personnel and of being in some sort of mess hall all alone. He thinks that these may have been implanted memories, used in an attempt to fog his actual recall of the UFO sighting.

Warren's pronouncements infuriated the other witnesses. They said that Warren's story was a pure fabrication and that nothing he said can be believed. Although his story *does* match with some of the events described by the others, he is the only one saying that he saw aliens. Also, nobody else can recall him being on the scene at the time of the incident. Warren remains firm, however, that what he has told us is the truth.

While the reports from these highly-trained witnesses are compelling, it is, the narrator told us, the discrepancies in their stories that cause concern.

Astronomer and retired Air Force major, James McGaha, was convinced that what the witnesses saw on those nights was the Orford Ness lighthouse. He explained that at night, the beam from the lighthouse can be scattered by the trees, creating weird effects. John Burroughs disagreed and reminded us that in his report, he clearly stated that they saw and quickly recognised the beam from the lighthouse. Georgina Bruni told us that no lighthouse can move through the trees, dart about the sky and shine beams down to the ground. McGaha countered this by saying that on the night of the 25<sup>th</sup> December, a Soviet Cosmos satellite re-entered the Earth's atmosphere and would have looked like a very bright fireball. He fails to account for the discrepancy in the dates, however, plus the fact that such an event would be transitory and not last for several hours, as described by the witnesses.

In 2002, declassified government files shed new light on what happened that night in 1980. The documents showed that an RAF investigation had taken place in 1981 and that the investigators were happy that what the witnesses described was *not* the Orford Ness Lighthouse. The files also state that the radar facilities at the time were faulty and that no recordings were made of any radar contacts. In fact, the files say that the radar camera

recorder was switched off. Listen to the fascinating interview with Gary Baker on the free UFOData Report CD for more about this amazing statement.



The files also showed that the investigations had been based around Halt's memo, which stated that the sightings began on the 27<sup>th</sup> December, when the sightings had begun on the 25<sup>th</sup>. The programme is wrong here, because the first sighting was after midnight on the 26<sup>th</sup> December, long after any sighting of the Cosmos satellite may or may not have been made. The only photographs made available show the clearing, but no evidence of a landed craft. According to the investigation, what happened that night was 'no threat to national security'.

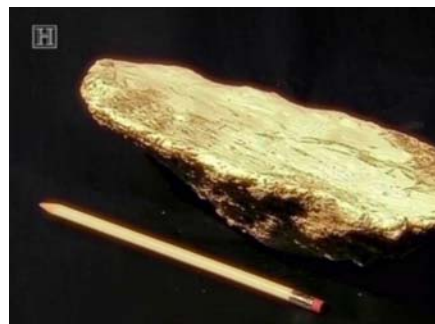
If, Larry Warren asked, UFOs beaming down lights onto a nuclear weapons storage area isn't of defence significance, what is?

James McGaha responded that if a real UFO had been hovering over the base, shining down beams of light, then everybody would have been awoken and placed on a high state of alert. That didn't happen, he said.

Nick Pope declared that, as a great many of the key staff of the base were on leave, there was a decision-making vacuum. I find this an astounding statement to make. Lt. Col. Halt was the deputy base commander. He went on to become the actual base commander. If he can't make the appropriate decisions during an incident of this nature, who can?

The narrator went on to say that the Rendlesham Forest Incident is likely to remain a mystery.

What we are left with are a few government documents that are often contradictory or incomplete, the stories of the eyewitnesses and the physical evidence, like Jim Penniston's plaster moulds and drawings and Halt's tape recording.



Nick Pope closed by saying that everybody has heard of Roswell, but only UFO researchers know about Rendlesham. It is time that this case is placed alongside, or even above Roswell, as perhaps *the* most significant UFO encounter of all time.

*Britain's Roswell* gave us a serious, if sometimes incomplete or erroneous portrait of the events during the Rendlesham Incident. No

mention was made of researchers such as Brenda Butler and Dot Street, who gathered many eyewitness reports from local people who also saw strange lights in the sky at the same time, and were among the first people to break the story.

That said, the programme did try to focus on the events as reported by the eyewitnesses and any sceptical explanations were addressed, but not allowed to take over the programme, as often happens with this sort of documentary. The ambivalence shown towards the events, though, is infuriating. To simply suggest that the incident 'will remain a mystery' is like saying 'just forget about it and it will go away'.

I agree with Nick Pope that this incident should be elevated high above Roswell and any and all government documents related to this event should be released to the public. I'm sure you all agree. I'm also certain that it ain't gonna happen! If the base commander can be kept in the dark, then us plebs in the 'real world' most certainly can.

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